

Chapter 15 Social Consequences of the Dualist/Non-Dualist perspective. Of the Book, God is No-thing. The Apophatic Assertion The Salvation for Humankind – revised - . Copyright Rodger Ricketts Psy.D.,2022. All rights reserved. Protected by international copyright conventions. No part of this chapter may be reproduced in anymanner whatsoever, or stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, without expresspermission of the Author-publisher, except in case of brief quotations with dueacknowledgement. Published through CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

Chapter 15

Social Consequences of the Dualist/Non-Dualist perspective.

Philosopher, educator, and writer Martin Buber wrote in his book, I - Thou,

“Now from my own unforgettable experience I know well that there is a state in which the bonds of the personal nature of life seem to have fallen away from us and we experience an undivided unity.... I can elicit from those experiences only that in them I reached an undifferentiable unity of myself without form or content. I may call this an original pre-biographical unity and suppose that it is hidden unchanged beneath all biographical change, all development and complication of the Divine.”

Usually, the social, relationship and environmental consequences of the dualist, rationalist vs non-dualist, transcendental perspective are not explored in depth. In fact, there is less exploration regarding the direct social consequences of the adoption of either perspective than the psychological and transformational aspects. Therefore, I want to use the excellent clear analysis of the modern Jewish philosopher and educator, Martin Buber and others, to show that whichever of the two perspectives (Non-Dualist/Dualist) one predominately adopts, there are significant relational consequences. Here is a good place to remind the reader that the Dualist and non-dualist perspectives are not exclusive from one another.

Martin Buber’s (I and Thou) and (I and It)

“I believe that the key to creating society that is nourishing, empowering, and healing for everyone lies in how we relate to one another.” — Martin Buber
Martin Buber is best known for his 1923 book, Ich und Du (I and Thou), which distinguishes between ‘I-Thou’ and ‘I-It’, in which the du or thou, is intended to convey the most intimate and loving relation possible. Briefly, Thou means the

you in an intimate subject to-subject relationship, while 'I-It' is a relationship of subject-to-object modes of existence. 'I' is not a solitary concept that stands alone, unconnected; 'I' is always in relation to 'It' or 'Thou.' This relation indicates the two basic ways in which we relate to the world. The 'I' in the I-Thou relationship is 'betweenness,' empathetic and exploratory. While, when relating in an 'It' relation, one inspects 'It' from many possible perspectives; one categorizes it, analyzes it, judges it, and decides upon its 'value'. In I-It-experiences, expectations are primary determinants of approach. In the I-It relationship, the subjects are depersonalized, autonomous, isolated, and psychologically separated from a world which consists of things and objects. The 'I-It' relation is dominated by categories of dualism, like friend/enemy, good/bad, mind/body, winner/loser and focuses on universal definitions. According to Buber, most human beings solely adopt the I-It dualistic perspective.

While in the I-Thou relationship, human beings are aware of each other through an immanent unity of Being that is permanently pervading and sustaining the universe. When that happens, we understand and empathically feel that everything is inter-being, interconnected, and all living Beings are a Family of the Universe and divine existence is manifested in the material world. Born from the realm of pure experience, Being is not an ontological category, but in the ordinary world of phenomena experienced directly, with no intervening conceptualization.

Karlfried Durckheim wrote in his book, *Daily Life as Spiritual Exercise*, (1971), similar insights regarding the I-Thou relationship. He wrote that there is a vital Person who is met in another as a Thou or experienced within us as an I. When we meet an other as a Thou, we are able to know them in their existential relationship to the world and to life and only then does someone as Person appear. With our direct participation in their life, it is then possible to see them as an element in a system of interrelated parts. Only when they are present to us as a Thou can we feel and sense them in their personal, human existence, where they, like ourselves are striving for happiness, meaning and fulfilment. When this happens, we recognize in them a sibling who is on their way as a person.

The Buddha also taught, what is now clear through scientific investigation, that humans and the environment are deeply enmeshed and co-interacting and codependent on each other. This is one existence, and every action by all living and nonliving forces interact with and alter the continuously changing reality—some more than others. Therefore, once we comprehend and apply the truths that the Buddha and Buber and others had discovered and are now explicated in more

modern terminology and description, there is a real possibility for a heaven on Earth without the distraction of seeking supernatural intervention. Heaven on Earth can briefly be described as a world of sentient beings thriving through wisdom and empathy, and compassion.

Alienation

The I-It is a relationship of separateness, detachment and ultimately alienation created by the exclusive dualistic subject/object dichotomy. Identifications appear by comparing and setting themselves apart from others. So long as you have/are yourself as only a discrete object, your experience of self and others is as a thing among things. Once a subject, in the subject/object dyad, is analyzed as an object, the subject becomes an object or an It. When both objects and people are analyzed and dissected (I-It) and judged by the opinionated capacities and 'value', they become a means to an end. The I is experienced as isolated from the It, resulting in alienation or estrangement.

In his book, *Hara: The Vital Center of Man*, Karfried Durkheim expands on what he calls the malformations of the I. When the I is 'rigidified' or set too autonomous/separate, all its actions and transactions are conditioned by fixed ideas (biases) about what is or ought to be. The I must always catalogue, classify, correct, and try to make things better or perfect for itself. It relies on itself alone. In social relationships the rigidified I is egotistical and egocentric. It finds it difficult to empathize with others because it is always revolving around itself. The rigid I is always afraid of change and losing itself in yielding. All the original, normal life-impulses and instincts are converted into goals of the virtual world of an egotistically driven will creating a special artificial system of tension and angst. The Mind/Body is constantly disturbed with, for example, egotist suppositions and biases, obsessions with certain desires, by fears and doubts, unable to let go of anger, resentments, or compulsions, and an I held fast by fixations for perfection. In the end, while a person may realize that their tensions are caused by nothing more than their I and its tightly entwined encapsulation or ego-shell, they also desire to relax, unfolded and be one with others, and life. But tragically, they do not know how rid themselves of their personal alienation and remains fixated cutting themselves off from their own creative powers and the fullness and unifying strength of Life or Being.

To view the world as an 'objective reality' separated from one's consciousness and the universal Being is a form of alienation. The state or experience of

alienation includes isolation, depersonalization in which the self seems unreal, estrangement, separation, and severance. Alienation is the state of being as an outsider or the feeling of being isolated, as from others or the original Being. This experience is expressed poetically by Simon and Garfunkel; *“I am a rock, I am an island, I’ve built walls, A fortress deep and mighty, that none may penetrate.”* Alienation is the process whereby people become foreign to Being of which they exist/reside in. This is the dominant alienation in modern society. This alienation is described in the book, *Ishmael*, by Daniel Quinn. *‘The Takers are a profoundly lonely people. The world for them is enemy territory, and they live in it like an army of occupation, alienated and isolated by their (delusional)extraordinary specialness.’*

The principle of alienation is found in all the great religions, namely, the idea that people in the past have known the non-dualistic Absolute and lived in serenity and harmony. But with the development and rise of the ‘I’ analytical, linguistic world, there was a rupture which left people feeling like strangers to each other and in the world. Also, there has often been the vision that at some time in the future, this alienation will be overcome, and humanity will again live in harmony with itself and Nature.

The I–It is the mode of experience in which we engage the world as a detached, without true connection, object. It is based upon the axioms of logical empiricism/positivism: objectivity, determinism, abstractive contemplation, and a utilitarian approach to the other. This is the method of the rational investigation of truths and principles of science and philosophy, through which we come to understand things abstractly and intellectually, eventually solely for our egocentric use. Buber claimed that modern Western culture believes that this dualistic mode is the fundamental way for human beings to participate with the world. Therefore, other perspectives, which are vital to our authentic and awakened spiritual existence, are dismissed and even vilified.

As Professor L.K. Tong expressed this: *“And so you opted for the substantialist’s art of self-making, Cutting off all umbilical cords to the Mother of Field-Being. You first dignify yourself in the kingly robes of an independent entity, enthroning yourself in the lonely kingdom of ego-substance. Then with the projective magic of your subjective substantiality, you objectify everything on your way to Godlike rigidity. And with the pointing of the substantializing wand, a bond was broken; a shade of mutuality has withered and waned. Now everything becomes merely external and separate from everything else. External is your*

objective world, your objectified God, and your objectified self. Anything you cannot safely possess and control you relegate to the dark side of the Other, the Hell, the objective pole, and condemned it as an illusion, unreal, ugly, or evil. Oh, in carrying your Godlike rigidity to all eternity (as if you were in fact rigidly eternal), you, a virtuoso in dualization, have created the most unhappy situation.”

While I-It is relevant and applicable on the personal, and interpersonal levels, another hinderance is its overwhelming predominance in modern technocratic society, with its basis on the principles of logical empiricism/positivism. It is a mechanistic model viewing the Universe and all its forms as a machine, and the rational and empirical is operational in all areas of study with the grand vision of Humans gaining mastery over everything including themselves. In the end, it creates a state or dysfunctional experience of alienated and estrangement.

Social Relationships

In social relationships, the alienated I-It individual is primarily egotistic, greedy, and selfish and finds it problematic to empathize and as the saying goes, ‘to put oneself in another’s shoes.’ They find it worrisome to be accessible and receptive because they are eremitic and insulated orientated. Every success cannot satisfy their craving for indisputable success. They rigidly think in or act in an egocentric manner of accepting only what pleases them and tenaciously maintain their likes and dislikes. Their personality stagnates by not maturing or consciously evolving and from not expressing their own creative capacities. Therefore, encapsulated, they never come to know the opportunity and satisfaction of interconnections and empathy with the world.

Rigidity of the ego ‘shell’ is one of the afflictions of the solitary ‘I’, and integration with the inner refuge of peace, serenity and nothingness is absent. The self, therefore, remains preoccupied with maintaining, by means of the organization of rigid structures or schemas, its secure position in the historical world. Through their filtering biases, a person believes they perceive the world ‘the way it really is’, rationally and logically according to their personal schemata. If a success is created, the egotistical person attributes it only to their own efforts, which only strengthens and heightens the wall separating them from the realization of their interconnectedness with all. The imagined self, preoccupied in establishing and classifying facts, constantly acts to satisfy its worldly cravings. With these fixed points of view, the world is clearly divided into a dualism of self-world/otherworld, subject/object, etc. While a person needs to be skillful to

manage the world wisely, the predominance of the egocentric perspective, with its claims of supremacy, distorts not only a person's personal and social status but any possible spiritual connection with existence, in which there is an apperception of oneness and inter-being to be realized with experience, insight and practice. Or author Charlene Spretnak has written, "*The boundary between ourselves and other people and between ourselves and Nature, is illusion. Oneness is reality.*"

The egotistic life constantly seeks to thrill itself in the available ways of the sensual materialistic life. The intensity of cravings varies, but the feedback loop is continuous and based on the subject/object duality. This exaggerated ignorance based on dualism creates foolishness, suffering, and unhappiness. At the root of why many people seek temporary, even harmful relief in many destructive ways is a clear example of spiritual ignorance, and hence suffering, i.e., alienation from life. Egocentric ignorance creates suffering for self, others, and the Gaia.

Modern Society

Buber believed that with modern technological society increasingly supporting the I-It doctrine, the possible loving relationship between individuals and nature, between other sentient beings, understanding their identity within the Divine in an Apophatic sense has become increasingly more obscure and incomprehensible. As philosopher Jacques Derrida wrote regarding modern society's increased depersonalization, "*Face-to-face relationships, communities of direct caretaking, control, and ownership of one's own labor power, all these are giving way more and more to relations mediated by cell phone, digicam, digital communications replacing the immediacy of speech.*" Instead, Buber wanted to revive the link between the individual with all levels of existence. To do that, he considered it necessary to unveil the impediments that hamper a person's capacity to see and understand the No-thingness. As a result of the modern trend, it continues to become more difficult to develop an appreciation of an immanent, universal being. The problem is rooted in the supposition of the primacy of the dualistic subject-object relation. Buber believed that there had been a dramatic shift from relation to separation, creating a growing crisis of alienation in 'modern' society. He believed that the relationship between individuals and society and creation continues to become increasingly that of I-It.

ECOLOGY and the I -THOU Relationship

The book *I and Thou* is well recognized as providing an enlightened perspective on the study of identity and social relations. However, on another level, the book was based on Buber's *Awakening to humanity's place in the Universe in relation to the Divine and Life*. Buber, as all Apophatic teachers, explains humanity's interdependence and the intrinsic reciprocal aspects embedded within all relationships. Buber's conception of the world is that all is interconnected, dependently co-originated and holistically integrated. He challenges the Cataphatic conventional theological perspective that separates humanity and existence or the Divine.

As we have seen, a key premise of Buber and other apothotic teachers is that there are two basic ways we can understand ourselves in relation to existence. First, using Buber's word of I-It, an individual has a view of an 'other,' be it object or person, as a different and quantifiable entity. Whether the subject in question is inanimate or a living being, the perception has an implied objectification. This that allows the mind to make convenient generalizations. These are necessary operations of our daily existence, classifications, and equations. The second perspective is Buber's I-Thou or mystical one. From this perspective, one acknowledges the transcendence of the fundamental distinction between oneself and a 'other' and it is replaced by a relational reality.

One's life as a person standing in relation and intimacy to existence is acknowledged. In talking about a tree, Buber demonstrates the two ways of thinking: *"I consider a tree. I can look on it as a picture: stiff column in a shock of light, or splash of green shot with the delicate blue and silver of the background. I can perceive it as movement: flowing veins on clinging, pressing pith, suck of the roots, breathing of the leaves, ceaseless commerce with earth and air—and the obscure growth itself. I can classify it in a species and study it as a type in its structure and mode of life. I can subdue its actual presence and form so sternly that I recognize it only as an expression of law... I can dissipate it and perpetuate it in number, in pure numerical relation. In all this the tree remains my object, occupies space and time, and has its nature and constitution. It can, however, also come about, if I have both will and grace, that in considering the tree I become bound up in relation to it. The tree is now no longer It... It is not necessary for me to give up any of the ways in which I consider the tree... Rather it is everything, picture and movement, species and type, law, and number, indivisibly united in the event."*

Buber shows that he can choose to see the tree as a measurable and discrete It, or relate to the tree as a Thou, thus acknowledging their boundless ability to affect everything. His enlightened awareness of a tree interconnected and shared immanent relationship with all confers this possibility. From within this, we can understand how each affect another.

There are three main perspectives in modern Ecology: Anthropocentrism considers humans to be the most important thing in the Universe/Earth (I-It). From a more I-Thou view, there are biocentrism and ecocentrism. Biocentrism considers all living beings have inherent value and ecocentrism considers the broader value of the ecosystems which have both living and nonliving components. Ecocentrism is the belief that ecosystems, including all things (living and nonliving), have inherent value regardless of their perceived usefulness or importance to human beings. Therefore, ecocentrism recognizes a nature centered system of values. For example, a policy to protect Yellowstone Park wolves and limit hunting would probably be described as biocentric, while a policy designed to protect Yellowstone wilderness (thereby also protecting the wolves) would probably be described as ecocentric. Both empathize the interconnectedness of everything. As naturalist Aldo Leopold's statement indicates, *"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends to be otherwise."* Also, anthropologist Jane Goodall believes that *"Every life is precious regardless of what you think of it. Unless we develop respect for every life form, we will end up killing most of our ecosystem. We are all interdependent and destroying nature is the equivalent of killing our own selves."*

Another Apophatic teacher, The Buddha, gives primary importance to the spiritual framework of relational interdependence through the principle of dependent origination. This view of the Universe and human beings undergirds an imperative for people to realize the interdependent nature of their existence and the interconnection among all things. Two principal Truths that the Buddha taught were Anatta and Dependent Origination: Nothing lives on its own, all are interdependent. We are alive not only due to our parents, air, food, and water, but the entire ecosystem (ultimately the Earth) we live in. Dependent Origination recognizes that everything, including the psychophysical compound that we call our body/mind, exists only in relation to other beings and things and undergoes constant changes responding and reacting to them. There is a plural causality of all things whereby each thing arises in relation to all others and can therefore be

said to be influenced by all others. There are vast numbers of influences that affect us constantly- some help us thrive, others not. We cannot remain the same for two moments. We are like a flame. Whatever is subject to origination is also subject to cessation. Every form has the cycle of existence- to begin, age, to become disordered, and eventually cease to exist. That which carries on after death are our life elements and trends. There is nothing that can be called a permanent 'I'. The identities of 'I,' 'me' and 'mine' are illusions that we construct with our minds.

When we comprehend Life and these principles, one develops a strong sense of responsibility for our own behaviors, as well as appreciation, empathy and compassion for others. It is from this realization of the true interbeing nature of existence that non-harming, compassionate, and altruistic action best arises. The reciprocation of one's being with another is the birthplace of care and compassion.

Within the I-It there is separation and alienation, while in I-Thou we find relation, edification, and transcendence. Thus, our ability to love and show affection stems from our capacity to Awaken. It is this facet of dependent origination that also our treatment of the environment or Gaia is created upon how we view ourselves within it. To willfully assume a relation of care, one's views must be attuned. The Buddha attributes all our harming behaviors and suffering is caused by human ignorance (avijja), that is, we do not see the world as it is and nor properly our place within that existence. We are ignorant to the cosmic reality that everything in the world is interrelated, interdependent, and impermanent. By not discovering this worldview, we think we are separate from others as an isolated and independent entity. This ignorance is what the Buddha identifies as the very root cause of violence, conflict, alienation, environmental destruction, and war, which prevents sentient beings from living a thriving and peaceful life.

If we comprehend humanity's reciprocal relationship with the earth and the Universe and that our relationship is shaped by our Truth and vision, then our attitudes towards each other and the environment are manifested in our treatment of it. As Buber's account points out so well, a tree can be seen as a simple, inanimate object, valued by our selfish needs, or as a captivating and wondrous being whose experience of life is ultimately interconnected to the Biosphere. Is a forest only a resource to satisfy our needs or is it a vital habitat for all?

Biocentrism

We are at the point now to consider the term biocentrism or life-centered (biocentric) approach to ourselves and nature. Biocentrism encompasses all environmental ethics that “extend the status of moral object from not only human beings to all living things in nature.” Biocentric ethics, like I-Thou and dependent origination, calls for a radical readjustment of the relationship between humans, nature, and existence. It views that nature does not exist simply to be used or consumed by humans, but that humans are simply one species amongst many, and that since we are part of the ecosystem, any actions which negatively affect the living systems of which we are a part adversely affect us as well.

Biocentrists view life from an I-Thou perspective, observe that all species have inherent value, and that humans are not ‘superior’ to other species in a moral or ethical sense. The four main pillars of a biocentric outlook are:

1. Humans and all other species are members of Earth's community.
2. All species are part of a system of interdependence.
3. All living organisms pursue their own ‘good’ in their own ways.
4. Human beings are not inherently superior to other living things.

Physician and Noble Prize winner Albert Schweitzer was another 20th-century thinker who understood that Life itself is the decisive factor in determining moral value. Working in very remote areas, Schweitzer experienced the diversity, complexity, and multiplicity of plant and animal life forms rarely possible within industrialized societies. Schweitzer used the phrase ‘reverence for life’ to convey what he understood to be the most appropriate and accurate attitude toward all living beings. Life itself, in all its mystery and wonderment, commands respect, reverence, and awe.

To quote Albert Schweitzer,

“Ethics are complete, profound, and alive only when addressed to all living beings. Only then we are in spiritual connection with the world ... Profound love demands a deep conception and out of this develops reverence for the mystery of life. It brings us close to all beings. To the poorest and smallest, as well as all others. We reject the idea that man is ‘master of other creatures,’ ‘lord’ above all others. We bow to reality. We recognize that all existence is a mystery, like our own existence. The poor fly which we would like to kill with our hand has come

into existence like ourselves. It knows anxiety, it knows hope for happiness, it knows the fear of not existing anymore. Has any man so far been able to create a fly? That is why our neighbor is not only man: my neighbor is a creature like myself, subject to the same joys, the same fears, and the idea of reverence for life gives us something more profound and mightier than the idea of humanism. It includes all living beings” (The Schweitzer Album, edited by Erica Anderson, 1965, p. 174).

Biocentrism is best understood as an attitude with which to approach life and not a codified dogma. By approaching each living being with reverence and humility human life becomes more meaningful. Also, biocentric morality and ethics develops virtues and behaviors with which humans interact with empathy and affinity with other living beings. The Buddha also tells us that the key to a compassionate ethic of Life is when we see the inter-being in existence, the infinite interconnectedness of all life.

The Buddha taught, *“One is not called noble who harms living beings. By not harming living beings one is called noble.”* Or *“All tremble at violence; all fear death. Putting oneself in the place of another, one should not harm nor cause another to be harmed.”* We understand that our desire to thrive is the same for all other sentient beings, thereby, recognizing that all beings tremble at violence, that all wish to live, to thrive and do not want to be harmed. It is this affinity with all who share the gift of life that one naturally empathizes and recognizes themselves in the place of all sentient beings. Recognizing this, one will feel connected to all, friendly, kind with others and attempt to enhance their ability to thrive.

Most importantly, from an ecological Biocentric point of view one comprehends how the biosphere is interconnected and supports all life forms. Contrary to the egocentric assumption that humanity is at the apex of the eco pyramid, and its interests supersede that of other creatures, biocentrism denies human superiority and claims that all living things have inherent value. Biocentrism proposes that the highest moral standing is life itself, and all living beings deserve moral and ethical consideration. Inherent in this reciprocal dynamic of interrelatedness, there is an emphasis on humanity’s Right relation with itself and the natural world.

Or as Buddhist Lama Anagarika Govinda expressed in his book *The Way Of The White Clouds* (2006)

“He who wants to follow the Path of the Buddha must give up all thoughts of 'I' and 'mine'. But this giving up does not make us poorer; it actually makes us richer, because what we renounce and destroy are the walls that keep us imprisoned; and what we gain is that supreme freedom, which is not to be understood simply as a merging into the whole or a feeling of identity with others, but as the experience of an infinite relationship, according to which every individual is essentially connected with all that exists, thus embracing all living beings in his own mind, taking part in their deepest experience, and sharing their sorrow and joy.”

Because of our ignorance of embeddedness in the I-It perspective and not Awakening to the non-dual nature of existence, humans are ignorant to the cosmic reality that everything in the world is interrelated, interdependent. Their inability to properly view the world as it is, has distorted their discernment of its inherent value. For much of humanity, instead of harmonizing their mindsets and hence lifestyles with an equitable and just nature, their ignorance creates suffering through the egotistical gratification of greed, anger and alienation.

As Buber explains,

“to step into pure relation is not to disregard everything but to see everything in the ‘Thou’, not to renounce the world but to establish it on its true basis.” Thus, we lift the veil of ignorance and the illusion of separateness and alienation and, instead, we come to see the world as it truly is and hence act empathically and wisely.

A similar view was proposed by A. Einstein

“...A human being is a part of the whole, called by us the Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest- a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and of a foundation for inner security.” (N.Y. Post, November 28, 1972)

To exist well, humankind must shift from the predominant dogma of dualism which creates most of our problems, to a non-dualism which is not only different but also True. Non dualism is a radically different way of understanding and

organizing personal beliefs, complex systems and organization policies by transcending dualistic thinking and schemata. Life-based principles require recognizing a very different, even radical approach of how to live our lives as successful and prosperous human beings.

As R.G.H. Siu wrote in his book, *The Land of Keikitran and Eleevan*,

“There is no separation of man and his environment; rather there is a fusion of man and his environment. Ecology represents the study of the ecological entity as a whole. When a given ecological complex appears unfavorable from the standpoint of man, for example, he does not have a prior claim to adjustment on the part of the other elements of the complex. The others have just as much ‘right’ to demand modification of his behavior as he has on theirs. All are one in Nature. The appreciation of this Oneness and the delicate interrelationships of its diffusions represents the prime purpose of Ecology.”

But, as history has continually shown us and continues even today, human behaviors that destroy, murder, annihilate and create massive suffering, not only for all sentient beings but also includes the earth’s ecosystems are all to normal - therefore, transformation from ignorance is absolutely necessary. The course is clear, and the guidelines are well situated and proven. What is needed, as in any important human endeavor, is not only the desire, which in this case, humans want peace, prosperity, and happiness, but also the correct effort and knowledge for success.